

DHS Graduation Speech: Principal Ellen Dunn

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Darien High School Principal Ellen Dunn gave this "Presentation" speech (as prepared), for the Class of 2016 at their DHS graduation ceremony Thursday:

Good afternoon Members of the Darien Board of Education, Dr. Dan Brenner [superintendent of schools], colleagues, parents, grandparents, guests and most distinguished members of the Darien High School Class of 2016 ...

There is a long tradition at Darien High School of the graduates handing the principal a small gift as they receive their diplomas. I have been informed that the plan tonight is for each of you to give me a tiny origami star.

You have selected the perfect gift. Stars capture our imaginations; they fuel our dreams and carry our wishes.

On a day like today, there is no better symbol.

You have been stars on the stage, field of competition, and in our classrooms.

You have excelled in every arena. You have proven over and over that nothing is beyond your reach. Your academic excellence, award winning performances in music and theatre, your research in science, nationally recognized art work, and outstanding athletic success demonstrate that by all tangible measures you are the best and brightest.

But you are stars in other, more important ways. Truly grateful for what you have been given, you pause for a moment to say thank you to your teachers before rushing off to your next class. You show your kindness to those in need through countless hours of volunteer work in our community.

Your warmth and light hearted playfulness are legendary at DHS and your deep and abiding friendships will stand the test of time. As a class, your calm disposition and sense of humor has endeared you to all of us and the truth is you could have talked me into almost anything.

After all, you convinced me set the courtyard on fire for Homecoming. I wasn't sure if I would still be principal on Monday morning — but how could I dampen your spirit?

As a former science teacher, I remind you that stars shine because of what burns inside. The fusion of hydrogen releases immense energy, creating both heat and light.

For years the light travels silently through space before it is eventually seen as a twinkling light in the sky.

Your light, too, comes from within. When challenges test who you are, go to your own core; listen to the whispers of your heart to find the answers you seek. Remember that what is right may not be what is easy. Most often it is not.

As children, you looked to the sky and you wondered. You held your breath waiting for a shooting star to disrupt the darkness. It is easy tonight to imagine you as you were then and the wishes you might have made. Tonight I offer these wishes for you ...

Allow yourselves to be vulnerable. So many of life's regrets come from withholding love.

Remember that your choices matter ... the small ones and the big ones ... they all matter. Make them carefully.

Use your talents. Don't fear the judgment of critics who watch from the sidelines. Sing. Dance. Play. Never be embarrassed to be who you are.

Forgive yourself and others because we learn most from our mistakes.

Find wonder in the beauty all around you. Observe your world and its miracles. Be grateful.

Don't waste precious time worrying. Most things that set us back in life come from out of nowhere.

When you fail, ask "what can this teach me?" Find the lessons in all things.

Make happiness your choice. Your thoughts belong to you alone and they determine your outlook on the world.

Work hard at something you love. Rest your head at night knowing you have given of yourself.

Allow yourself to cry. It is a visible sign to others of your humanity. Don't hide your pain. Embrace it. Share it and friends will ease your burden.

Act courageously. Never sacrifice your integrity because once lost it is hard to find.

Don't hide your light. You have so much to give to the world. Give it freely and with humility.

This week NASA scientists discovered that the universe is expanding at a rate 5 times greater than our earlier predictions. So the stars we see as fixed and reliable in our sky are actually moving away from us ... And it is much the same with you, our stars tonight.

This is not a sudden departure. You have been moving away imperceptibly over the last four years. You have changed, and you have changed us in return ... You have been finding your voice and discovering your independence and in the blink of an eye you are ready to take the next step on your journey.

Every time we glance at your stars, we will remember what you have meant to us. Echoing the words from your childhood ...

Star Light, Star Bright

The first star I see tonight

I wish I may, I wish I might

Have the wish I wish tonight

We love you ...

Mr. Michael Harmon, members of the Darien Board of Education and Dr. Dan Brenner, I am proud to present to you the Class of 2016.